

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness is often cited as one of the most prominent indicators of our nation's social and economic condition. Even during the unprecedented economic boom of the late 1990's, the rising tide of the economy did not lift all boats. As income inequality increased, the economic security of low-income families decreased. Now, in the wake of a sharp downturn in the economy, marked by increasing unemployment rates and poverty, the economic landscape of the United States and the State of California has changed dramatically. Homelessness is on the rise nationally and statewide. In an effort to generate valid qualitative and quantitative data regarding the issue of homelessness in San Bernardino County, the Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County (formerly Community Services Department of San Bernardino County) contracted Applied Survey Research (ASR) to conduct the first comprehensive and systematic Homeless Census and Survey of San Bernardino County, California. This executive summary provides an overview of the process, and the results, of this groundbreaking study.

METHODOLOGY

The two-fold methodology used in this study was successfully implemented in several counties across California, and touted as an example of exceptional innovation by a statewide coalition of homeless advocacy and service provider organizations. The cornerstone of this methodology was the first component, a peer-oriented, point-in-time (daily) count of street and sheltered homeless. The street count portion of this census was accomplished through a systematic canvassing of all voting districts of every city throughout the County, while the shelter count involved telephone interviews with every known emergency shelter, transitional housing facility, hospital, jail, motels that accept vouchers, and any other location that might be temporarily housing homeless residents on the evening of the census. To supplement the point-in-time figure, an annual estimate of homeless individuals was also calculated.

The second major component of the project consisted of comprehensive one-on-one interviews, which were conducted with 1,723 homeless San Bernardino County residents in order to shed some light on who the homeless are, what caused their homelessness, what it is like to experience homelessness, and what services they need in order to transition into permanent housing. All of the research activities were community inclusive and relied heavily on homeless residents and service providers in the data collection phase.

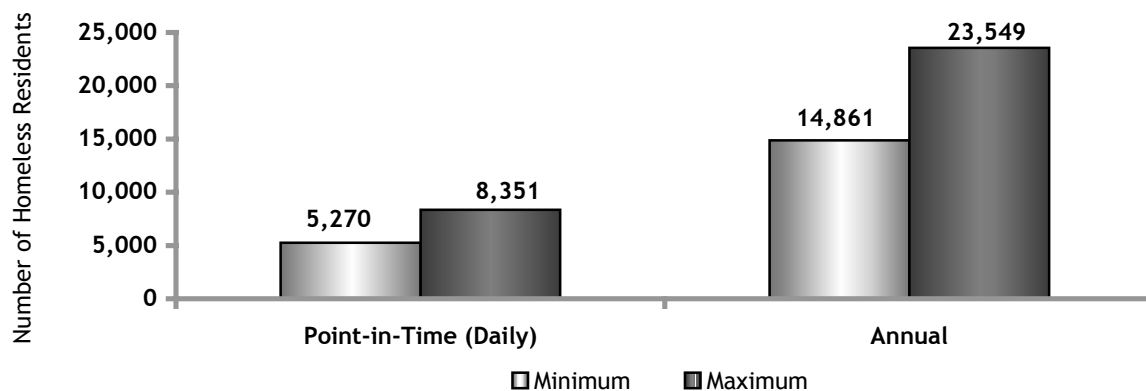
WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?

According to the Stewart B. McKinney Act of 1987, a person is homeless if he or she lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence and has a primary nighttime residence that is either a public or private shelter, an institution that provided temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or a public or private location that was not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE HOMELESS?

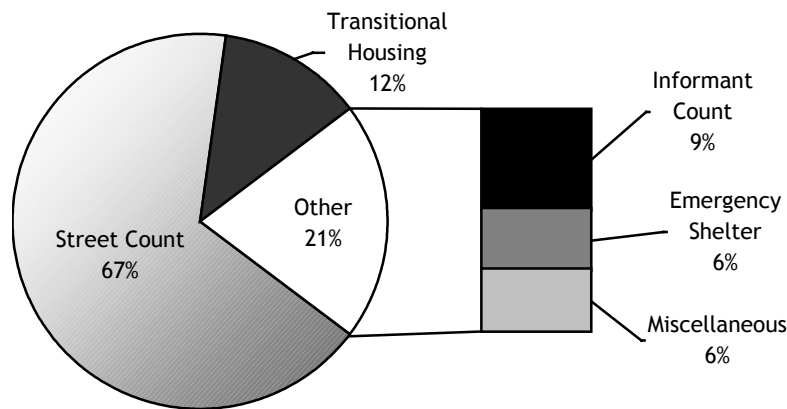
The estimated point in time (daily) number of homeless residents in San Bernardino County in 2002 ranged between a minimum of 5,270 persons to as many as 8,351 persons. Survey data regarding the average length of homelessness indicates that the homeless population renews itself approximately 2.82 times during every year, or stated differently, that between 14,861 and 23,549 unduplicated San Bernardino County residents experience homelessness in a given year. This range represents between 0.8% and 1.3% of the County's total population. This percentage is comparable to current national estimates of homelessness, which range between 2.3 and 3.5 million individuals, or approximately 0.9% to 1.3% of the national population (*Millions Still Face Homelessness in a Booming Economy: New Estimates Reveal a Large and Changing Homeless Population Served by Growing Diverse Network*, Urban Institute, 2000).

Figure 1 — Estimated Point-in-Time (Daily) and Annual Range of Homeless Residents in San Bernardino County, 2002



Most homeless counted in the census (67%) were observed during the street count. Additionally, many homeless (12%) were counted in transitional housing facilities and fewer (6%) were counted in emergency shelters. Overall, less than one-fifth of those counted were counted in shelter and transitional housing facilities. Further, many groups were likely to have been undercounted, including those who live in automobiles, vans, converted garages, and other structures not intended for human habitation.

Figure 2 — Percentage of San Bernardino County Homeless Residents Counted by Census Category (n=5,270)

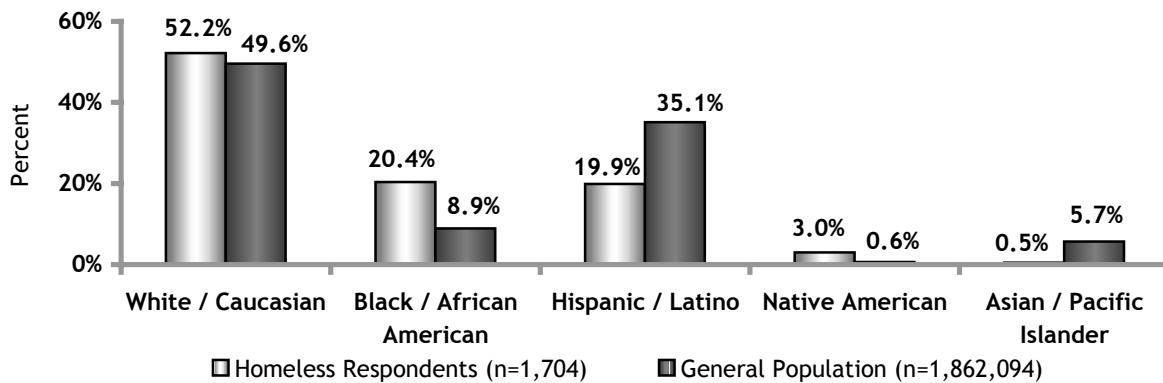


More than two-thirds of homeless counted in the enumeration were individuals, most of which (73%) were individual adult males. Nearly 900 homeless adult women were counted in the enumeration, comprising nearly 25% of all homeless individuals counted. Further, 116 unaccompanied children under the age of 18 years were also counted in the enumeration. More than 300 homeless families were counted, representing 1,118 homeless family members and 21% of all homeless persons counted. Of these family members, 15% were adult males, 29% were adult females, and the remaining 56% were homeless children under the age of 18 years. Overall, including individuals and families, a total of 737 homeless children under 18 years old were counted, representing 14% of all homeless persons counted.

WHO ARE THE HOMELESS?

The face of homelessness in the United States is changing, and includes increasing numbers of women and families with children. Similarly, the homeless population of San Bernardino County is diverse, representing a range of racial / ethnic groups, ages, and family compositions. The “typical” homeless respondent was a Caucasian male, 39 years old, who had lived in San Bernardino County for more than 10 years, had a high school diploma, and had never served in the military. The racial / ethnic distribution of homeless residents did not closely mirror that of the general population. While a comparable percentage of the homeless population were Caucasian, within that population African Americans were over-represented, and Latinos were under-represented.

Figure 3 — Which Racial / Ethnic Group Do You Identify With the Most?

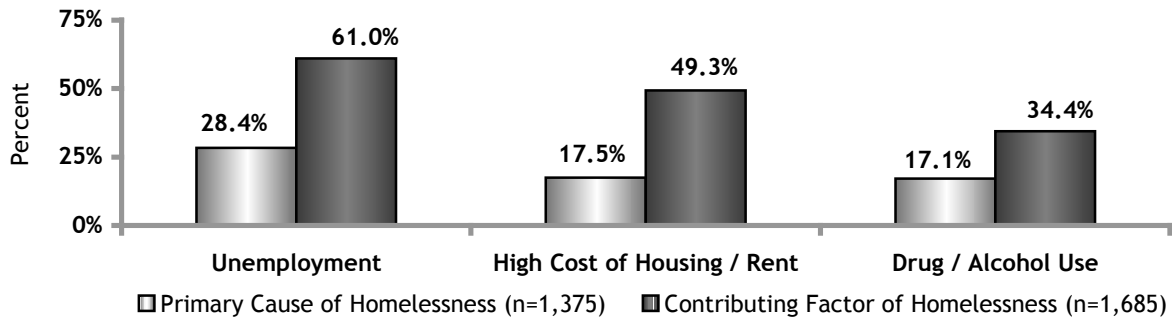


Source: General population data provided by the State of California Department of Finance, *Race / Ethnic Population with Age and Sex Detail*, 2003.

Nearly one-third of homeless survey respondents (32%) were women. Many homeless respondents reported living alone (45%) while 41% lived with family or friends and 13% lived with a spouse or partner. Half of respondents had children (49%), and a third (32%) had children under the age of 18. Further, more than one in every ten survey respondents (12%) had at least one child under age 18 currently living with them.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS?

The greatest cause of homelessness reported by respondents in San Bernardino County was unemployment. Nearly one-third of survey respondents (28%) indicated that unemployment was the primary cause of their homelessness, and even more respondents (61%) indicated that unemployment was a contributing factor in their homelessness. In addition, nearly one-fifth of respondents (18%) reported that the high cost of housing was the primary cause of their homelessness, with nearly half of all respondents (49%) indicating that the cost of housing was a contributing factor. Additionally, more than one-third of respondents indicated that alcohol or drug use contributed to their homelessness, and 17% indicated that alcohol or drug use was the primary cause of their homelessness. More than one in every ten respondents (12%) reported that mental health issues contributed to their becoming homeless, and 2% indicated that mental health issues were the primary cause of their homelessness.

Figure 4 — What Factors Contributed to or Caused Your Homelessness? (Top 3 Responses)**WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE HOMELESS?**

Respondents' experiences of homelessness varied greatly. For example, homeless residents of San Bernardino County are living in a wide variety of locations. Most commonly, respondents were living on a temporary basis in situations like "couch-surfing" with family and friends (31%), or were living outdoors (28%). Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) indicated that they were living in some sort of shelter or transitional housing, and many others were living in an automobile (9%) or in a converted garage or other structures not intended for human habitation (9%).

The length of time that respondents had been homeless also varied considerably, with 10% of respondents indicating that they had been homeless for less than one month, and 8% reporting that they had been homeless for more than five years. The greatest portions of respondents had been homeless for 1 – 2 years (21%) or more than 2 years (21%). The experience of homelessness in San Bernardino County is also marked by poverty, hunger, and illness. Nearly 90% of homeless respondents earn less than the Federal Poverty Level of \$750 per month, 46% do not usually get enough food to eat, and 27% didn't receive the health care they needed within the past year.

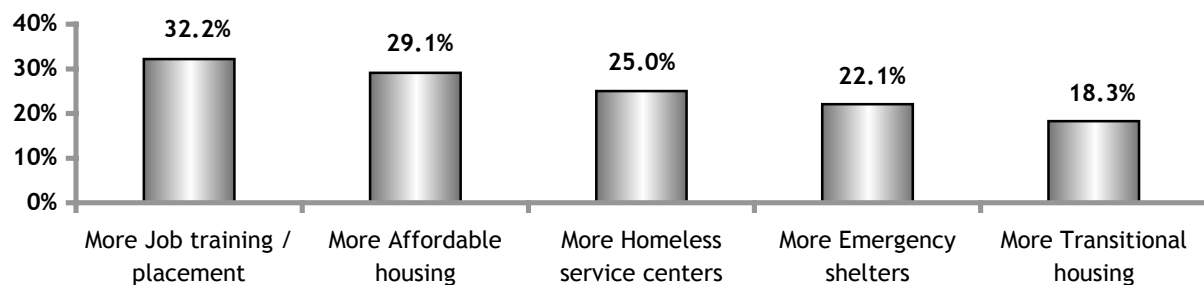
WHAT SERVICES DO THE HOMELESS NEED?

Many services are available to homeless residents of San Bernardino County, yet some homeless residents are not receiving the services they need. Although 18% of respondents were receiving food stamps, 12% were receiving Medi-Cal, and 11% were receiving Social Security Insurance, two thirds of respondents (67%) were not receiving any of these types of government assistance. These respondents were asked why they were not receiving any type of governmental assistance. Although the income data confirms that most if not all homeless respondents were living under the Federal Poverty Level and therefore qualify for a range of services, the most frequently cited answer was that respondents did not think they were eligible to receive such services (29%). Additional responses included lack of a permanent address (26%) and lack of proper identification (23%). Some respondents indicated that they had never applied for

such services (21%), they disliked the hassle (18%), or they did not need government assistance (8%).

Finally, homeless survey respondents were asked what types of homeless services San Bernardino County needs the most. The answers to this question mirror the causes of homelessness, as the number one service requested by the County's homeless population is more job training and placement programs (32%), followed closely by more affordable housing (29%). The availability of more emergency shelters and transitional housing facilities were fourth and fifth on the list of requests.

Figure 5 — In Your Opinion, What One Type of Service Does San Bernardino County Need the Most? (Top 5 Responses)



Multiple response question with 1,686 respondents offering 2,951 responses.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of this study show that despite the hard work of countless devoted service providers, San Bernardino County continues to struggle with the growing problem of homelessness. Further, while much previous statewide and national research on homelessness has focused primarily on behavioral factors, data contained within this report emphasizes the importance of economic factors that influence homelessness. With unemployment cited as the greatest cause of homelessness in San Bernardino County, and job training and placement cited by homeless respondents as the service most needed, it is clear that economic issues are paramount. The prominence of homeless women, and homeless families with children, demonstrate that the County's homeless population is diverse and dynamic. As the characteristics and needs of the homeless population continue to evolve, the importance of measuring such characteristics and needs heightens. This community-wide research effort, and the results that have been established, hold the potential to assist San Bernardino County in the acquisition of additional funding for homeless services, as well as to help service providers craft and refine programs that truly reflect the needs of the dynamic population they serve.